



WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Westwood Families,

December 2018

At last spring's town meeting, Westwood residents supported the School Department's efforts to address our capital needs by appropriating funds for a school building project Feasibility Study. We want to update you on our progress and draw your attention to next steps.

As you know, Westwood is on track to receive significant funding from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to help us address the needs of some of our older facilities and offer our students a state-of-the-art educational experience. Communities that are invited into the MSBA process are eligible to receive partial reimbursement for school building projects within certain parameters.

We are currently in the first phase of a multi-step process and are on schedule to request advancement to the next phase of the process—the Feasibility Study—in February 2019. The Feasibility Study is where potential projects are evaluated and a detailed plan for the size, scope and cost of our project is formalized.

Over the last several months, the District has provided the MSBA with required information and data to assess our community's needs and determine what falls within the MSBA's budget. In November, representatives from the School Department and from Town Hall had an initial meeting with representatives from MSBA to hear the MSBA's analysis of that information and to understand further the parameters around the MSBA's reimbursement.

As a result of that meeting, we are currently comparing the MSBA's enrollment projections with information we have from enrollment studies commissioned by the School Department. Though the overall District enrollment has remained fairly stable over the last 10 years, our community is once again growing, a fact that will need to be considered as we move forward.

We should make clear that it is unlikely that any one building project can address all of our facility needs. However, we want to ensure that the options examined during the Feasibility Study result in a solution that addresses as many current needs as possible, maximizes the financial assistance we receive from the state, and leaves us well positioned for the future.

Once we move into the Feasibility Study, we will be holding community forums to gather input and identify the criteria that are important to any future school building. When we understand the community's vision, we can use that vision to develop the most cost-effective and educationally appropriate recommendations with the MSBA. The timeline we are currently following will give us completed school building designs in 2020, allow us to begin construction in 2021, and provide us with a completed project in 2023.

Westwood is entering an exciting phase in our future planning and we look forward to engaging with the community to continue providing the highest quality education. We encourage you to stay informed of

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our progress. We will provide updates on our work with the MSBA at our monthly School Committee meetings. In addition, on the District website (www.westwood.k12.ma.us), you will find a page dedicated to updating the community throughout this process: from the district home page, click the “Elementary Building Project” link under the “District” menu.

We are excited to move forward with this project and we thank you for your continued interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Emily J. Parks
Superintendent of Schools

Charles Donahue
Westwood School
Committee Chair

Westwood Teachers Collaborate, Gain Strategies Through District’s Internal Professional Development

Just like their students, teachers look forward to summer for a much-needed break from the grind of the school year. But rather than shun learning until September, once they’ve had some time to relax and recharge, many teachers eagerly turn to professional development (PD) opportunities. The Westwood School District proudly supports its educators by offering free summer PD courses with a unique model: teachers teaching teachers.

“Believe it or not, we don’t often get to talk to each other about teaching,” said **Claire Dorman**, a special educator with the Sheehan School. “This program allows us to connect with colleagues, collaborate, and learn together.” Dorman also runs the district-wide program for students with social-emotional disabilities and taught *Developing a Classroom that Supports Social Emotional Learning* this summer.

“It’s a great opportunity to get together across schools in the same district and share our common experiences and knowledge in a context specific to our issues, goals, and student population,” said **Sarah Waterman**, who teaches 4th grade at the Deerfield

School and co-taught *Increasing Student Engagement in Math for ALL Learners* with Deerfield K-5 Math Specialist **Julie Galante**.

That course was inspired by challenges Waterman faced last year. “I had a wide-ranging student population and sometimes struggled to keep them all engaged,” Waterman said. She told Galante, who recommended the book, *Routines for Reasoning: Fostering the Mathematical Practices in All Students*. The course snowballed from there.

Terese Hardy, a 2nd grade teacher at Deerfield who took the course, loves teaching math and understands the difficulty of accommodating learners of different abilities. “The best thing about the routines we learned is that they give all children the chance to succeed. They come at children at their own level of understanding with a focus on the thinking first, not the right answer.”

Hardy and others who took the district’s summer PD courses emphasized how invaluable the high-quality, no-cost professional development options are. Another benefit they cited is the timing.

“Because it was summer, I could delve deep, pull together the resources and tools I wanted to bring back to my classroom, and even make slideshows that I’m already using with my students just a week into the school year,” said Hardy.

Jill Luskin, a 3rd grade teacher who took Dorman’s course, is also implementing new strategies. “I’ve always incorporated mindfulness in my classroom, but now I’m trying a new tactic—a morning routine designed to help my students slow down and center themselves to prepare for learning.”

For the final project in Dorman’s class, teachers selected one new tactic to apply in September and October. A continuing online component of the course requires the teacher-students to reflect, evaluate, and adjust the strategy they chose.

“Social-emotional learning needs to be part of the culture of the classroom, and each teacher needs to find which tools fit his or her teaching style. It has to be authentic, or it won’t work,” Dorman said. “My goal was to give teachers some new ideas, make their toolboxes a little bigger.” And that’s exactly what the district wants its summer PD offerings to do. 